

Talk in '68 of bridge was sign of population explosion on horizon

By TED VAN ARSDOL
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CAMAS — When blacks rioted in the big cities and Martin Luther King was marching, the tremors were reaching into the smaller communities, even Camas.

In 1968, the city established a Human Rights Commission to deal with integration problems. Some blacks were being hired at the huge Crown Zellerbach Corp. mill, and rumors were circulating about their numbers and possible impact on the city.

But the portents for Camas were broader than racial.

"Get ready for a population explosion," Bob Archer, Clark County Public Utility District Commission chairman, advised Camas-Washougal Chamber of Commerce in 1968.

An engineering report was predicting the most spectacular growth on Prune Hill, spurred in part by the proposed construction of a bridge across the Columbia River at Government Island.

At the start of 1968 the CZ mill employed 2,600 men and women. It

was Clark County's biggest industry, and had been a reliable source of jobs for more than eight decades.

Racial tension peaked with the firebombing of a Vietnamese residence in 1961. But Camas generally has avoided any major disturbances involving race, and the Human Rights Commission is no longer even in existence.

One of the significant property changes was the 1977 sale of nearly 250 acres on the south side of Lacamas Lake by a daughter of F.W. Leadbetter to Tom Shipler, who started cutting down trees. The lake, timbered and rustic appearing, had been a recreation area for many years.

The sale foreshadowed major residential development at and near the lake, and a continuing controversy with conservationists about some aspects of the changes.

In 1962, the new Interstate 205 bridge was opened, providing easy access between Camas and east Portland including Portland International Airport. This intensified pressure to develop choice lots on Prune Hill.

In the wake of the bridge opening, the city went on an annexation spree west and northwest of the municipality. In 1963-84, Camas added more than 1,800 undeveloped acres.

The biggest single annexation, called Vancouver View and totaling about 1,500 acres at Prune Hill, was approved in 1990.

Annexations have about doubled the geographical size of Camas, which now totals 7,225 acres.

And people are moving in. Population climbed from 5,920 in 1980 to 6,796 in 1990 and 7,430 this year.

The big mill, now operated by James River Corp., still dominates the Camas skyline and economy. But it is somewhat less of a factor now, because of job decline to 1,655 hourly and salaries employees, and the establishment of other industries in west Camas.

The mill fronts on the tree-lined business district, where a new Camas Downtown Association wages a continuing effort to maintain a viable retail center, in coordination with Camas-Washougal Chamber of Commerce.



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Trees and plants provide pleasant atmosphere for shoppers in Camas Mall along Fourth Avenue.